

**Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Fisheries Division**

**Environmental Assessment and H.B. 495 Document**

**Sidney Bridge Fishing Access Site Development Project**

General Purpose: The 1977 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-605 which directs the Department to acquire, develop and operate a system of fishing accesses. The legislation established an earmarked funding account to ensure that this function would be accomplished. The site at Sidney Bridge has been used by the public for some time through the courtesy of the previous private landowner. The site has been used to access the Yellowstone River without any formal site development. Officially, this project will be the initial site development and is intended to offer safe boat launching facilities to the lower Yellowstone River.

**I. Location of the Project**

The Sidney Bridge Fishing Access Site is located on 3.25 acres which is owned in fee title by the Department. The legal description of this site is, Township 22 North, Range 59 East, Section 16 - Richland County. The principal access route is three miles south from Sidney on State Highway 16, one mile east on State Highway 23, across the Yellowstone River to the site access road.

**II. Need for the Project**

The total estimated fishing pressure in Montana for 1991 was 2,300,763 angler days. The Fishing Access Site program currently has 313 sites distributed across the state in all major drainages. This program is an essential component of fisheries management in Montana because a large percentage of the angler use is achieved through these sites.

The Sidney Bridge site is located within reach "01" of the Yellowstone River (from the confluence with the Missouri River to the Powder River). This reach currently supports an estimated 18,065 angler days per year. The estimated additional use that will be supplied by this site is 1,500 angler days per year. At the present time, the distance between Diamond Willow and Seven Sisters (23 miles) is seen

as being excessive. The program criteria intends to position these sites at approximately four hour float intervals (about 8 to 10 miles). The criteria is based on offering numerous opportunities and thereby maintaining acceptable user concentrations through voluntary angler distribution.

This project is expected to produce a modest increase in the recreational use of this section of the River. The amount of increased non-angler recreational use caused by this development is unknown.

### III. Scope of the Project

The proposed site design will include an access road and cul-de-sac, parking lot, boundary fence, boat ramp and one latrine. These facilities are intended to improve access, sanitation and safety on this portion of the Yellowstone River while accommodating this use in a minimal impact fashion. The nearest upstream public access point is Seven Sisters (11.5 miles) and the next closest downstream access is Diamond Willow (10.5 miles).

A preliminary site design is included as Appendix A.

The specific improvements being proposed are as follows:

- 1) Road construction is required to provide safe and convenient access to the river. This project requires approximately 1,000 lineal feet roadway (20 foot wide) constructed on this site. Since the site is small in size and located immediately adjacent to the highway alternative alignments are limited.
- 2) Parking Areas are needed to accommodate river users and minimize weed problems associated with indiscriminate vehicle use. The parking modifications will include 11,000 square feet of gravel parking. The parking is intended to provide for 14 vehicles with boat trailers.
- 3) Boundary Fencing needs to be relocated on two sides of the property to aid identification of site limits. Approximately 638 lineal feet of fence will be removed. The fence materials will be reused and some new

materials added in on approxiamately 728 lineal feet of fence.

- 4) Signs are needed to inform the public of the site's existence and define site rules. Four signs are needed on the approach to the site and one on-site. Approach signs will include the Fishing Access Site logo of a fish and hook. A total of 5 signs will be installed.
- 5) Boat Ramp construction is needed to provided access to the Yellowstone River. The proposed design is for a 16 foot wide by 100 foot long concrete ramp.
- 6) Latrine installation is included with this site project. These facilities are needed for convenience of the angling public and sanitation of the site. The design calls for one disabled accessible latrine.

#### IV. Environmental Impact Checklist

See the attached checklist.

#### V. Explanation of Minor Impacts to the Physical Environment

##### 2) Water Quality

Water quality will be maintained despite this project. Sediment contribution from the site to the surface waters will be minimized by site grading, gravel surfacing of roadways, and installation of a paved boat ramp.

A temporary and slight degradation of water quality is likely to result during the construction period. This is usually unavoidable during several aspects of the typical FAS site project. Any necessary construction activities that might contribute sediment to the surface waters, will require compliance with the Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences best management practices for these situations. Compliance with these stipulations is required of all contractors.

3) Soil Stability

As stated in the previous section, this project will minimize soil erosion through appropriate road improvements. The new site roads will provide access and parking with the intended side-benefit of controlling unwanted random use that often results in compromising the vegetation and increasing erosion. This construction project will avoid damage to trees whenever possible and allow the other vegetative ground cover to stabilize the site soils.

4) Vegetative Cover

As previously stated, this site project will maintain the integrity of the vegetation that remains after essential facilities are installed.

Those portions of the site that will be developed as roads and parking will, in all likelihood, be irretrievably committed to recreational site uses. The actual surface area proposed for construction is approximately 3/4 of an acre or 1/5 of the entire site area. This appears to be a worthwhile trade-off for the public recreational opportunity being afforded.

5) Aesthetics

H.B. 495 requires consideration of the site's capacity for development. The proposed design utilizes standard engineering practices to provide the road, parking and boat ramp facilities. The latrine will be the standard exposed-aggregate model that will blend well with the surroundings.

Site aesthetics will not be appreciably damaged by this project. Special care will be used to minimize the loss of trees on the site. Providing quality facilities, like the road and ramp, will encourage users of the site to behave responsibly.

8) Demands on Environmental Resources

The intent of the Fishing Access Site program is to provide opportunity for quality water-based outdoor recreation. This construction project will provide use of this site without degradation. This project will provide a modest level of increased use on the Yellowstone River, but should not cause an erosion of the quality of the recreational experience.

9) Historical and Archeological Sites

The Sidney Bridge site was surveyed for cultural resources for a project titled Yellowstone River Bridge Project (F26-1(2)3) by Historical Research Associates in 1986. The survey located nothing and the Department has been in consultation with SHPO. SHPO's letter is included as part of this document as Appendix B.

V. Explanation of Minor Impacts to the Human Environment

6) Quantity and Distribution of Community and Personal Income -- H.B. 495 Requirement - Tourism

See the section below entitled, "Commercial Activity."

7) Access to and Quality of Recreational Activities

See the section above entitled, "Demands on Environmental Resources."

10) Demands on Government Services -- H.B. 495 Requirement - Long-range Maintenance of the Improvements

This site will add an additional commitment of operation and maintenance funds to the Department. Sidney Bridge is located in the Department's Administrative Region 7 where there currently are 24 sites operated under the Fishing Access Site program.

The regional budget per site average is \$2,972 annually. This includes administrative charges for staff time obligations (required shop time, user communications, etc.). Much of the costs are the result of transportation to and from the sites.

11) Commercial Activity -- H.B. 495 Requirement - Impacts on Tourism

This construction should maintain the site aesthetics and will have negligible impact on the local economy or human distribution. This project will simply make river access more convenient for the angling public. The site project is not large enough to constitute a major attraction but will probably result in a modest increase in the use of the river.

A draft of this project proposal was taken to the Montana Department of Commerce, Travel Montana for review. It was concluded that the work would have a mildly positive and unquantifiable impact on the local tourism economy.

15) H.B. 495 Requirement - Describe how this project relates to the entire Fishing Access Site system, as a whole.

This project is minimal in scope and is therefore within the conservative intent of the entire system. There is nothing being proposed at this site that could be interpreted as a divergence from past management.

Strategic Planning accomplished by the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks during 1992 has set five goals. Goal B is to "Provide increased opportunities for public enjoyment of fish, wildlife and parks resources while maintaining our commitment to improve landowner-sportsperson relations." This Fishing Access Site project is intended to accomplish this goal of providing expanded opportunity.

## VI. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives

### 1) The "No Action" Alternative

If no alteration is done to the Sidney Bridge property, the following situations are likely to occur:

- this section of the river is likely to continue to offer recreational access to those who have "inside knowledge" and to those willing to make the long river float,
- the Sidney Bridge property will continue to provide access to those who are aware of this site's existence and willing to use the present unsafe river bank to launch non motorized craft,
- the Sidney Bridge site will be subjected to deterioration of the vegetative cover,
- as the site vegetative cover declines, the contribution of sediment to the surface waters will increase,
- the deterioration of vegetation will result in the expansion of noxious weeds, and
- the public will not be offered reasonable access to recreational opportunities on the Yellowstone River.

### 2) The Proposed Alternative

The Sidney Bridge Fishing Access Site construction project is an effort to provide site facilities at a responsible management level. This project will result in the following:

- a boat launch facility to an area of the river where access is severely limited,
- a positive rapport with the Sidney area civic leaders and recreationists (who are anxious for increased access to the Yellowstone River),

- a responsible level of management of the site to protect the vegetation in the undeveloped portion of the site,
- a minimal sediment contribution to the surface waters,
- a more manageable noxious weed situation
- a modest increase in the angler use of the Yellowstone River, and
- much improved sanitary conditions.

## VII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

- 1) Is an EIS required? No

This review has clearly demonstrated that the impacts associated with this project are not significant. The net result of the proposed work is a positive improvement to the human and physical environment.

- 2) Describe the level of Public involvement. H.B. 495 requires statewide and local announcement.

Since several meetings were held on the site with representatives of local sportsmens groups, additional public meetings were not deemed needed necessary unless requested. Legal Notices soliciting local public interest will be published in the Sidney Herald. Legal Notices will also be published in the Helena Independent Record to solicit any statewide interest.

- 3) Duration of the comment period? 30 days

Public comment will be accepted through May 12, 1997

- 4) Name, title, address and phone number of the Person Responsible for Preparing the EA/H.B.495 Document.

John Little  
Regional Parks Manager  
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
P.O. Box 1630



Miles City, MT 59301 (406) 232-0900  
DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS  
1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701  
(406) 444-2535

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

Project Title: Sidney Bridge Fishing Access Site Development Project.

Division/Bureau: Parks

Description of Project The proposed project at Sidney Bridge is the initial development since this site was acquired in 1993. The project currently includes road construction, two parking area developments, construction of a boundary fence, the construction of a boat ramp, the installation of one vault latrine and the installation of the needed regulation signs.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats				X		
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality			X			X
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		X
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

# POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		X
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		X
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		X
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals				X		
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

15. Site Specific Modification System wide				X		X
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Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction State Historic Preservation Office

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Dept. of Commerce, State Historic Preservation Office, MDEWP

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS NO EIS REQUIRED

EA prepared by : John Little Date: January 9, 1997

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA)/HB 495  
TOURISM REPORT

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has initiated the review process as mandated by HB 495 and the Montana Environmental Policy Act in its consideration of the project described below. As part of the review process, input and comments are being solicited. Please complete the project name and project description portions and submit this form to:

Clint Blackwood, Tourism Development Coordinator  
Montana Promotion Division  
Department of Commerce  
1424 9th Avenue  
Helena, MT 59620-0533

Project Name Sidney Bridge Fishing Access Site Construction Project

Project Description Project is intended to improve access, sanitation, and safety on this portion of Yellowstone River through construction of an access road, cul-de-sac, parking lot, boundary fence, boat ramp and one latrine.

1. Would this site development project have a impact on the tourism economy?  
☐ NO ☒ YES If YES, briefly describe:

Proposed improvements would have a slightly positive, but unquantifiable impact on the local economy.

2. Does this impending improvement alter the quality or quantity of recreation/tourism opportunities and settings?  
☐ NO ☒ YES If YES, briefly describe:

Visitors to the area would have a much easier time accessing the Yellowstone River. Furthermore, with these improvements, more floaters and fishermen would be able to recreate on the Yellowstone and have a quality experience.

Signature

Clint Blackwood

Date

3/31/97

# Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks



1539 East Eleventh Ave. - 4th Floor  
PO Box 200701  
Helena, MT 59620-0701

April 2, 1996

Paul Putz  
State Historic Preservation Office  
1410 Eighth Avenue  
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Paul:

The Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks is proposing to use state and federal funds to develop a fishing access site on the property purchased from Montana Department of Transportation at Sidney. This property was surveyed for cultural resources for a project titled Yellowstone River Bridge Project (F26-1(2)3) by Historical Research Associates in 1986. I believe that the project replaced the existing bridge with a new bridge. The proposed Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks development will take place on the northeast quadrant of the new bridge.

FWP's project will consist of a gravel road, parking, turnaround area, boat ramp and latrines. During the cultural resource survey conducted by HRA in 1986, no cultural resources were located in the project area, which is the same area proposed for development by FWP.

Based on the consultant's negative report we believe that the proposed FWP project will have a low likelihood of impacting cultural resources. Please review your records and the proposed project and provide us with your comments.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

PAUL VALLE  
Cultural Resource Coordinator  
Design and Construction Bureau

Attachment

**CONCUR**  
NO PROPERTIES ON OR ELIGIBLE  
FOR NRHP APPEAR LIKELY TO  
EXIST WITHIN PROJECT IMPACT AREA  
**MONTANA SHPO**  
DATE 4-5-96 SIGNED

**RECEIVED**

APR 08 1996

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION  
DEPT. OF FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

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